

Masagos Zulkifli promoted to full minister in Cabinet changes

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The changes

Promoted to minister
Mr Masagos Zulkifli, 51
FROM TODAY: Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Second Minister for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs
WAS: Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs

New appointments

 Mr Chan Chun Sing, 45 Minister for Social and Family Development; Second Minister for Defence (until April 9)	 Mr Lim Swee Say, 60 Minister in the Prime Minister's Office and NTUC secretary-general (until May 4)	 Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, 46 Minister for Manpower (until May 4)	 Mr Lui Tuck Yew, 53 Minister for Transport
From today: Minister in the Prime Minister's Office From May 4: NTUC secretary-general	From May 4: Minister for Manpower; will relinquish posts as Minister in the PMO and as NTUC sec-gen	From today: Minister for Social and Family Development	From today: Second Minister for Defence, continues as Minister for Transport

A reshuffling of roles within the Cabinet and the labour movement leadership has resulted in a new minister, a new labour chief and new portfolios for three other ministers.

The changes - the fifth set since the May 2011 General Election (GE) - are mostly adjustments in the wake of Minister for Social and Family Development Chan Chun Sing moving to head the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC).

But in a surprise move, Mr Lim Swee Say, the man he is replacing as labour chief, will take over as Manpower Minister.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong also took the chance to refresh his leadership bench ahead of the next GE, which must be held by January 2017.

He promoted Mr Masagos Zulkifli to full minister in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) with effect from today, marking the first time Cabinet has two Malay ministers. The other is Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim.

Mr Masagos, 51, who will also become Second Minister for Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs, "has

performed well, both in his ministries and as an MP in Tampines", said PM Lee on Facebook yesterday.

Having two full ministers "reflects the progress of the Malay community", he added.

Meanwhile, the labour movement will get a new chief earlier than expected. Mr Chan, 45, who is now NTUC's deputy secretary-general, will take over as secretary-general on May 4. He was previously expected to be voted in as labour chief during the next NTUC central committee elections in October.

Also on May 4, Mr Lim, whom he is replacing, becomes Manpower Minister. Mr Lim, 60, is resigning from NTUC and is also stepping down as Minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

Closing the loop, current Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin, 46, will succeed Mr Chan today as Minister for Social and Family Development. He will also hold his current portfolio until Mr Lim takes the helm next month.

In addition, Mr Chan, who will be appointed Minister in the Prime Minister's Office from today, will relinquish his role as Second Minister for Defence.

That will be taken on by Mr Lui Tuck Yew, 53, in addition to his current portfolio as Transport Minister, effective today.

In his Facebook post, PM Lee described yesterday's changes as "part of continuing leadership renewal, to build a strong 'A' team for Singapore".

Political observers noted that the new appointments seem aimed at consolidating and refining the policy changes in recent years rather than taking things in a new direction. The ministers given new portfolios are expected to hit the ground running, they said.

Mr Tan's experience in manpower matters could be useful in handling social and family problems, many of which stem from unemployment or low incomes, said Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan.

Mr Lim will also be dealing with the same issues in the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) as he did at NTUC, from helping low-wage workers to improving retirement adequacy, noted Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh.

Associate Professor Tan added that the appointment of Mr Lim could signal that the MOM will take a greater interest in workers' issues.

"There's always been this longstanding concern that, within tripartism, business interests have a slightly heavier accent than the labour movement."

In a Facebook post yesterday, Mr Lim assured unionists that he will continue to be "pro-worker" while also being "pro-business".

"After all, the two are not necessarily in conflict. They are the two sides of a same coin," he said.